

CARMEL COOL

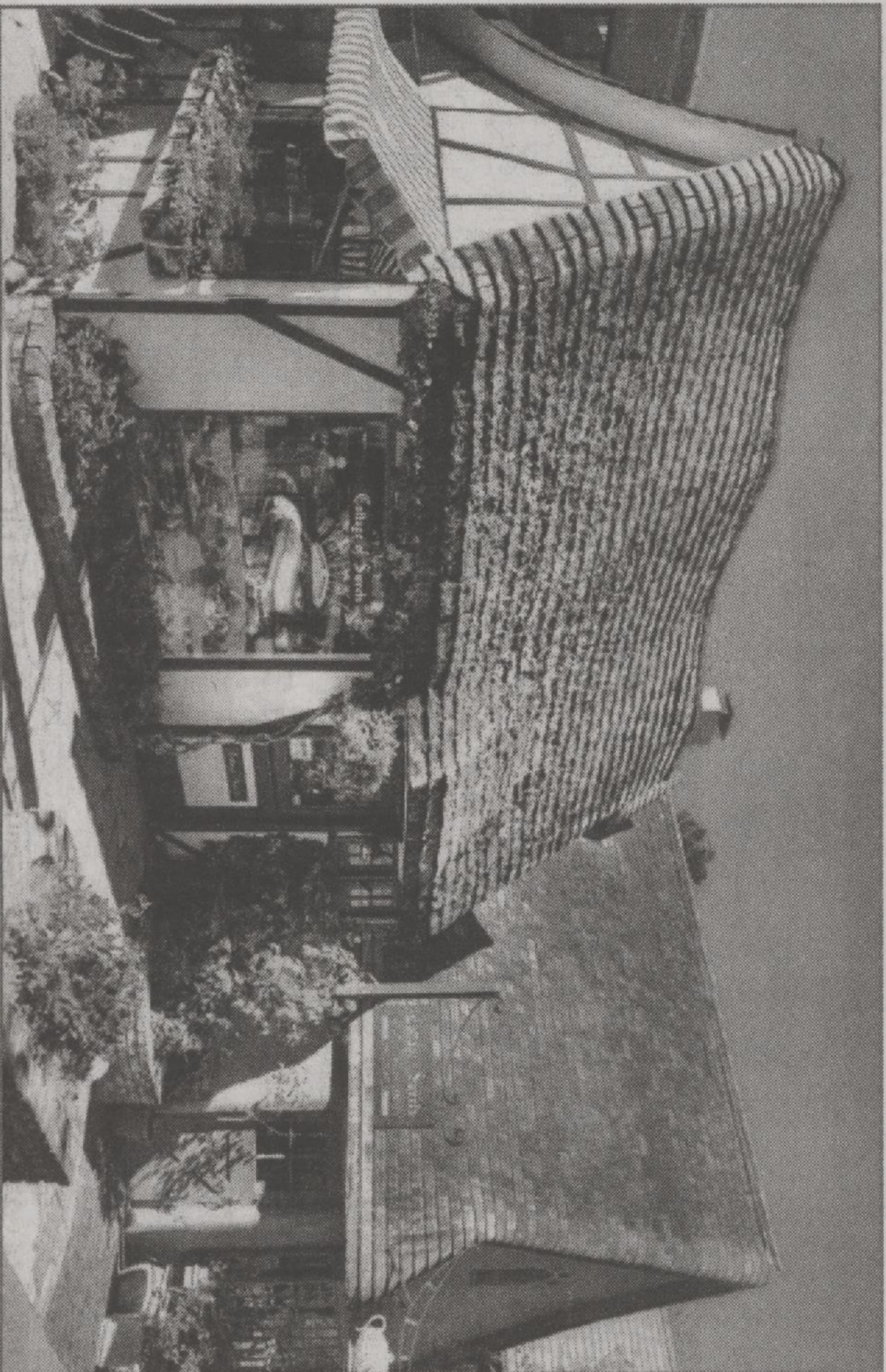
by Mona Day
Travel Reporter

In many ways, Carmel is a bit goofy - and therein lies its unique charm. To begin with, there are no street addresses: to locate a building you give the closest cross streets, directions, references ('5th house on the E side of Torres street'), or description ('the one with the blue trim and driftwood fence'). Without addresses, there's no postal delivery, so you pick up mail at the central post office. You say that's inefficient, they say it's an opportunity to run into fellow residents and catch up.

There's no parking meters, no streetlights (make sure to carry a flashlight at night), no jail (don't commit any

ing to warm up a bagel or quiche for you. Inn owner Amy Johnson makes it a point to meet and greet you at breakfast. She'll ask if you slept well, enquire about your plans for the day, offer tips, and help you find a restaurant for lunch or dinner. Afternoon snacks and refreshments are a welcome surprise. The chains have nothing on her.

The Bohemians from San Francisco were among the town's early settlers and the town still remains a haven for the creative types whose energy finds expression in some 90 galleries, antique shops and cafes. An easy way to explore is a leisurely two hour guided walk led by Gael Gallagher (Carmelwalks.com) which includes many of the storied haunts of the famous who have called Carmel home.



miss much because there are over 60 coffeehouses, bakeries, pubs, bistros and restaurants carrying fresh local produce of the fertile Salinas Valley, seafood from the Monterey Bay, and the region's world class wineries.

The Italian themed Little Napoli specializes in fried artichoke lollipops and spicy cioppino loaded with prawns, mussels, clams, calamari and crab. Cypress Inn has fried calamari, excellent poke, crab cakes, and lamb lollipops. Grasing's offers great sandabs along with other seafood and salads. As the name implies, L'Escargot specializes in French fare - escargot, sweetbreads, and quail in maple bourbon reduction.

Staci Giovino's three hour guided culinary and wine walking tour Carmel Food Tours is an efficient, social and fun way to check out the culinary scene. We stopped for samples of American Kobe beef shortrib on polenta with Merlot at Anton & Michel; more samples at the romantic Casa-

cater to special needs like pregnancy. Facials also run the gamut - calm facial, Vitamin C anti oxidant, acne aid or the peptide anti aging; with enhancements of eye treatment, fruit enzyme peel, and custom serum. The spa also offers private consultations and high quality, medical grade skincare. Make sure to ask for the package deals and seasonal specials.

Carmel boasts a diversity of big city cultural offerings. There is Carmel Music Society, Monterey County Symphony, Carmel Bach Festival, Monterey Jazz and Blues Festival, Pacific Repertory Theater, Carmel Shakespeare Festival, and Carmel Art & Film Festival. The Sunset Center offers a line up of world class performing arts; I grabbed the opportunity to watch Martha Graham Dance Company.

A day trip to the Monterey Aquarium is a must. Located on the site of a former sardine cannery on Cannery Row, the aquarium's center-

crimes there), and no cemeteries (so please don't die there). If you insist on wearing high heels, you'll need a permit from City Hall - yes, seriously. And its most famous mayor - Clint Eastwood - ran on a ticket that would allow ice cream cones just when the bad guys were about to ban them.

There are no franchises; all hotels are under 40 room mom and pops. I stayed at the quaint Carmel Country Inn which features a mix of cozy studios along with spacious suites with living rooms and large bathrooms with spa bathtubs. They come with fridges, coffeemakers and free wi-fi. Rooms open out to tiny gardens and unexpected patios.

The hotel's complimentary breakfast offers plenty of options like oatmeal, bagels, and yogurt that can get upscale: alongside peanut butter there is also almond butter, a huge bowl of berries, and catered bacon and spinach quiches delivered fresh every morning. The attentive staff is around tidying and cleaning up, offer-

As you walk the cobblestone streets with quaint fairy tale cottages featuring window box planters abloom with flowers, you are reminded of a storybook village. Trees are protected by city ordinance, so streets detour around them whimsically and buildings incorporate them in their design. Tiny unexpected pathways lead to hidden courtyards and secret gardens. And everywhere there are benches - inviting you to sit down, collect yourself, reflect, or strike up a conversation with a passing stranger.

Monterey County boasts almost 40,000 acres of wine country, and about 75 wineries have tasting rooms in and around the town. The Carmel Wine Walk is a self guided visit to 14 tasting rooms; a Wine Passport available at the Carmel Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center allows you a Wine Walk Flight of up to four one ounce pours at your choice of any nine tasting rooms.

Carmel's no franchise policy also means no fast food, but you won't

nova restaurant; seasonal pizzas at La Bicyclette - one with three kinds of cheeses, the other with caramelised onion puree and mushrooms on a base

piece is a giant 28-foot-high tank that can be viewed from several floors of the building. Exhibits include sunfish, stingrays, jellyfish, sea otters, and oth-



of roasted butternut squash; classic cocktails at Terry's Lounge at Cypress Inn, wine tasting at Figge Cellars, and finished off with Lula's Chocolates.

Trio Carmel is a tasting room that also carries exotic olive and nut oils and balsamics, and offers educational tastings to help you appreciate the nuances of their offerings. Pretty soon you'll be able to tell fresh grassy olive oils from the pungent 'double cough' varieties. Be sure to pick up a free brochure full of creative ways to use their products. My favorite discovery was blood orange balsamic on ice cream: yum.

Nestled in Morgan Court between 7th and Ocean Ave is Kush Day Spa. Operated by John Jertberg, it features a full menu of massages - Swedish, deep tissue, and warm stone with enhancements like aromatherapy, chocolate oil or sugar scrub that can

er native marine species. One striking exhibit featured a school of 3000 anchovies - once the foundation of Monterey's economy - swimming against the current. At an interactive jellyfish exhibit you can wave your arm to control fluorescent displays of jellies and coral as they dance, glow, and bloom. All this wonder is yours for only \$15 - the price of a movie ticket.

There is no shortage of outdoor activities in Carmel - horseback riding, jogging, walking, bicycling along coastal bluffs, hiking the trails of Point Lobos, and world class golf. Water activities include fishing, kayaking surfing, scuba. Of course, you don't have to be particularly athletic to enjoy its coastal splendor: just head out to the beach for a brisk morning walk, mist in the air, or catch a breathtaking sunset.

